

Forgiveness in Marriage

Forgiveness is a gift not a given. When we choose to forgive our spouse, we are giving up our "right" to hold something against them.

Asking for Forgiveness

1. Make an unconditional apology

An unconditional apology focuses on our responsibility in the matter – not our spouse's. It should sound something like this, "I was wrong for what I did and I am so sorry." Period. We don't make excuses or point the finger at our mate. An unconditional apology should not sound like this, "I am sorry, BUT IF YOU wouldn't have..." That is NOT an unconditional apology.

2. Humbly ask for the gift of forgiveness

Again, since forgiveness is not a given, we must ask for it. After our apology we need to sincerely ask our mate to forgive us.

3. Follow up with action

This is what gives substance to apologizing and asking for forgiveness. We need to sincerely repent – or turn away – from our wrongs. Whether it's attitudes or actions, we need to show our spouse that we are changing. And, we need to be open to their input as to what constitutes satisfactory change. Remember, they are the one who has been hurt so they might require more from us than we think necessary. But, we should be aware of their needs and be open to their suggestions.

4. Give your spouse time

Even if our spouse does accept our apology and grant forgiveness, we can't expect things to be better right away. Now sure, you might get over the small things more quickly – but for bigger things, it can take our spouse time to warm up to us again. Be patient with them. Time will show that you are changing and are sincere about not hurting them again.

Granting Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness is a choice not a feeling

We may not feel like forgiving our mate. We may want to harbor the anger and hurt and make them pay for what they have done. But, once you decide you want to grant forgiveness, you can begin to work through those feelings.

2. Share your hurt

After your spouse has apologized and asked for forgiveness you need to talk about the matter before you move on. It might be

3. Plan for change

Decide together what your spouse's change of heart will look like. Be clear about what you expect and what you need. The goal here is not to punish with requirements, but to set up guidelines that you both agree to. That way, there will be fewer gray areas that can lead to disappointment.

4. Stop the video

Do not replay your spouse's infraction over and over again in your mind. When your mind starts to wander and you begin to dwell on the incident and the hurt they caused you, tell yourself to stop. It's one thing to need to talk to someone like a pastor or a counselor about your pain so you can move past it, but it's another when you keep inflicting the pain on yourself by dwelling on the hurt. Deciding to truly forgive your spouse is re-committing to your relationship. Don't sabotage that recommitment by focusing on the negative.

5. Give yourself time

Just deciding to forgive will not strip away all of the pain of the incident. You need to give yourself time.

No one can make you forgive. It is your choice. But, if you decide not to forgive you will suffer the consequences of bitterness and frustration that harboring resentment brings. On the other hand, when you grant forgiveness you are taking the first step in ridding your heart of the pain you now feel. You are saying, "Yes, you hurt me and what you did was wrong. But, I am giving up my right to punish you. In so doing, I am rising above the pain you have caused me."

No one can make you forgive

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